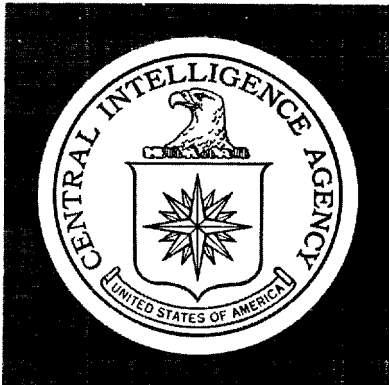


Secret

25X1



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Lebanon Faces Crucial Elections

Secret

№ 44

8 March 1968

No. 0010/68A

State Dept. review completed

Page Denied

SECRET

25X1

LEBANON FACES CRUCIAL ELECTIONS

In the forthcoming Lebanese elections, ideology and foreign policy issues will be more important than the normal pork-barreling efforts of the candidates. The stronger pan-Arab sentiment that has developed in the majority Muslim community since last June's Arab-Israeli war strengthens the prospects of the present parliamentary majority that supports former president Shihab and his policy of close identification with radical Arab nationalists. More conservative, pro-Western opposition groups may combine in reaction to the Shihabists' domestic socialist policies and threaten Lebanon with a Muslim-Christian communal crisis similar to that of 1958. The ideological and foreign policy conflicts are receiving added impetus from Egyptian and Saudi involvement in the Lebanese elections.

Background

Parliamentary elections will be held on three successive Sundays in late March and early April. Normally, Lebanese elections are a contest not of ideologies or issues but of the personal prestige of notables, or zuama, whose social or financial status makes them leaders in their local districts.

The zuama are elected separately by the different religious communities, which are allotted a percentage of parliamentary seats equal to their theoretical percentage of Lebanon's population. Zuama of the different communities join together in electoral lists in an attempt to form a majority in parliament. The objective of such alliances is usually to reap the spoils of

office, not to promote a particular ideology or policy.

The forthcoming elections, however, will have greater ideological significance than is usual in a Lebanese election, and foreign policy issues will be of considerable importance in the campaign.

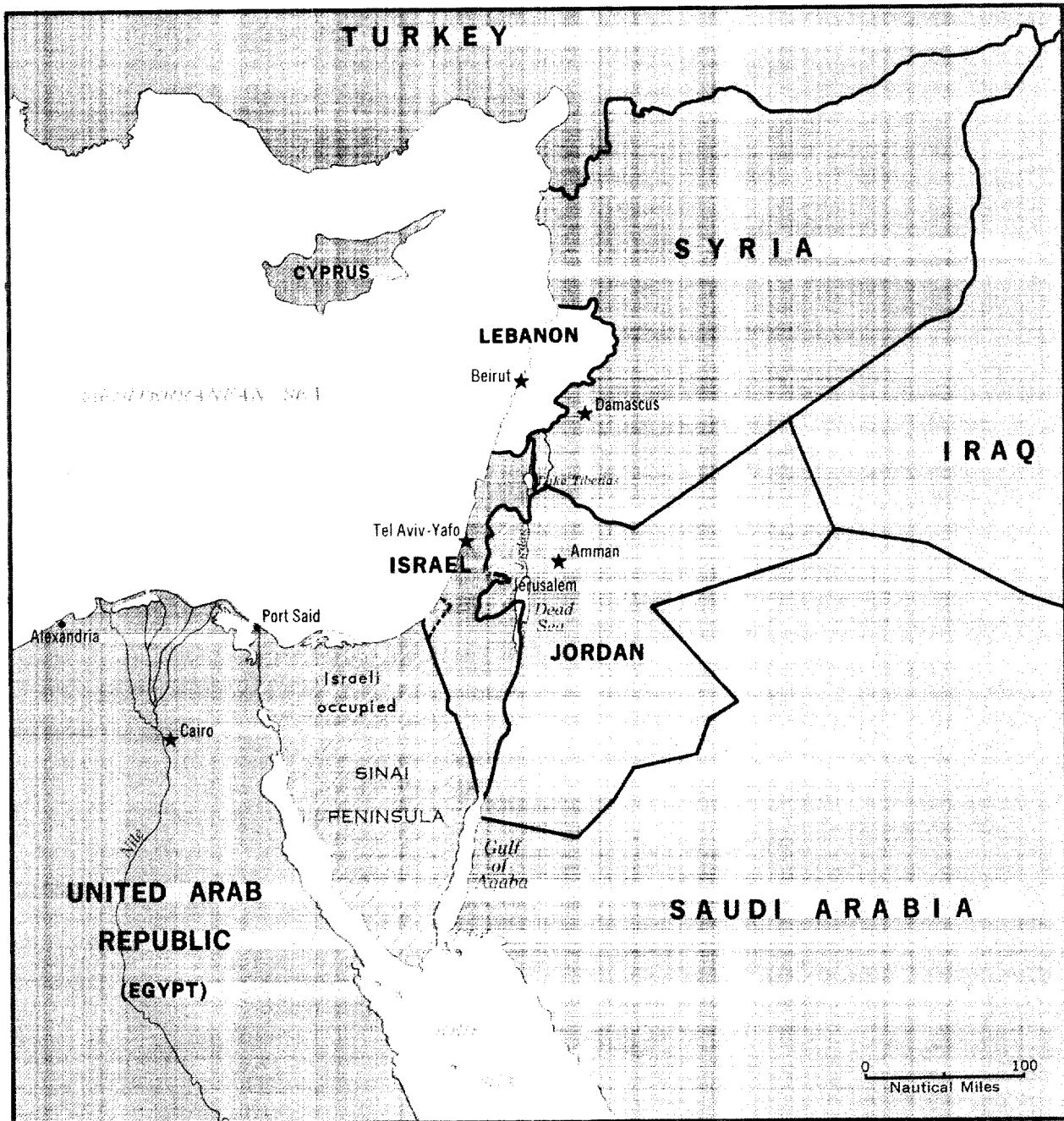
Foreign Policy Issues

President Hilu's moderate government has tried to keep in step with over-all Arab opinion without being caught up in disputes between the radicals and the conservatives. Recently, however, Lebanon has adopted a more pro-Egyptian line. It rejected Saudi Arabian King Faysal's proposals for an anti-Egyptian, Islamic alliance in 1966. No attempt has been made to muzzle the

SECRET

SECRET

25X1



69812 3-68

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

anti-Saudi outbursts of the Egyptian-subsidized press in Lebanon. Moreover, Lebanon has become the main asylum for radical political refugees from conservative Arab countries.

In the East-West conflict, Beirut ostensibly is neutral, but it inclines toward the West. The United States played the most important role in Lebanon during the last decade or so although its influence has fallen precipitately since the June war. US influence was at its peak in 1958, when the Chamoun government invoked the Eisenhower Doctrine and American military forces were put ashore in Lebanon.

During the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, however, US-Lebanese relations quickly deteriorated, and the government demanded that the US recall its ambassador and reduce its level of representation to that of chargé. Although government officials are still personally pro-American, official relations have remained on a low level because of the pressure of Lebanese public opinion.

Lebanon's increasing rapport with the radical Arab states and its cooler relations with the US are due in part to the growing political strength of the Muslim community. The population of Lebanon has been almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims of various sects. For most of the past, the Muslims acquiesced in Christian domination of the government providing that a basically pro-Arab foreign policy was followed.

The Muslims now compose a majority of the population, however, and are beginning to demand a closer identification with Lebanon's Arab neighbors. This pressure, fed to some degree by the growth of radical Arab nationalism in Egypt and Syria, has increased greatly during the last decade. Although the Muslims presently do not insist on the immediate incorporation of Lebanon into a greater Arab state, they will not allow Lebanon's return to a pro-Western stance.

It will be in the context of this increased importance of the pro-Arab militants that the major political groups will campaign in the forthcoming elections.

The Political Groupings

The most important political group is the Democratic Parliamentary Front (DPF), which dominates parliament with 56 of the 99 seats. If the non-Shihabist groups do not form a united front, the prospects are good that the Shihabists will maintain their present strength in the new parliament. When parliament elects a new president in 1970, the DPF is expected to support the candidacy of former president Shihab, who was in office from 1958 to 1964.

Although basically pro-Western, the Shihabists believe that Lebanon's interests will be better served by adopting foreign policies agreeable to the other Arab states. Specifically, they maintain that Lebanon must cooperate with Nasir both to

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

conciliate the Muslim sector of the population and to prevent the country from becoming isolated from its neighbors. They claim that the strongly pro-Western and anti-Nasir stance of the rival "Christian Opposition" alliance will exacerbate sectarian differences and raise the specter of a 1958-type civil war. In its domestic policies, the DPF believes that Lebanon's basically free-enterprise system must be modified to achieve greater social justice.

The second most important political group, generally called the "Christian Opposition," is a coalition of Pierre Jumayil's Maronite (Catholic) Phalange Party, Raymond Edde's National Bloc, and ex-president Camille Chamoun's National Liberal Bloc, the coalition's strongest member. The "Christian Opposition" is strongly pro-Western and is opposed to the Shihabist policy of accommodation with militant Arab nationalists. Domestically, the coalition is dedicated to the preservation of Lebanon's free-enterprise system. Moreover, it seeks to curtail the influence of the Lebanese Army, especially its intelligence unit, in the government. That influence has grown sizably since 1958 when Shihab replaced Chamoun as president.

The "Christian Opposition" offers the most serious challenge to the Shihabists in the forthcoming elections, and serves as the rallying point for other pro-Western elements. The coalition is fragile, however, and may collapse if its three leaders are

unable to reach agreement on a common slate of candidates. Moreover, the opportunistic Jumayil may decide to join the Shihabists if he believes it would be to his immediate advantage.

If the coalition does not collapse, a conceivably victorious alliance might be made with "The Beirut Grouping." This faction is made up of conservative Muslims who share the Shihabists' orientation toward a political accommodation with the Arab world and particularly with Egypt, but are opposed to the Shihabists' domestic socialist policies. There are indications that the "Christian Opposition" is attempting to form a coalition with "The Beirut Grouping."

The least important but most radical political group is composed of the various parties led by the erratic Druze feudal leader, Kamal Jumblatt. Jumblatt heads a seven-man parliamentary faction called The National Struggle Front. In addition, he is the leader of the Progressive Front in Lebanon, a coalition of the radical Arab Nationalists' Movement, the leftist Progressive Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the trade unions. Both fronts advocate an economic boycott--including oil--of the West and an extreme socialistic policy at home. Jumblatt's close identification with Nasir and his long-time opposition to Chamoun indicate that his bloc will support the Shihabists in parliament.

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

If neither the Shihabists nor the "Christian Opposition" and its allies win a majority in the elections, the four seats expected to be retained by the Armenian anti-Communist Tasnak Party may prove to be pivotal in favor of the anti-Shihabists. The Tasnak Party normally is concerned only with issues specifically affecting Armenians, but it has traditionally allied itself with politicians who favor the continuance of Lebanon's independence and a strong pro-Western foreign policy.

The Importance of the Army

The Lebanese Army and its intelligence component, commonly called the Deuxieme Bureau, have a privileged position in the government in terms of both its budget and its authority under President Hilu. The army tries to justify its privileged position by arguing that most anti-Shihabist politicians are preoccupied with their own self interests and have no real political principles or goals for the country. Consequently, the army maintains, the people are losing confidence in the government and in democratic procedures, and present institutions are slowly being eroded. The army believes it must play a political role to prevent extreme leftists from exploiting the growing popular discontent. Some army spokesmen claim it is especially necessary to control the forthcoming elections in order to prevent the return to parliament of those politicians who have

been responsible for what the army sees as a drift toward political chaos.

The army's primary instrument for interference is the Deuxieme Bureau. In possession of sizable amounts of funds, it seeks to bribe anti-Shihabist candidates and voters into the Shihabist camp. If bribery fails, it may use threats or, ultimately, physical force to prevent voters from going to the polls, as it has done in the past. Less blatantly, the army, which assists in the maintenance of polling stations, can either stuff or empty ballot boxes. Because elections are not all held at the same time throughout the country, the army can gauge voting trends and increase its interference in the voting districts as required.

25X1

External Political Pressures

Egypt is able to influence political developments in Lebanon more than any other Arab country. Lebanon's Sunni Muslims--who represent the majority Muslim sect and are concentrated in the cities of Beirut and Tripoli--and some Druze groups all view Nasir as their champion against the Christian groups that dominate Lebanese

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

affairs. To them, Nasir is the one force that could take Lebanon into a greater Arab state.

For example, Beirut newspapers subsidized by Egypt have engaged in vehement attacks on King Faysal and on the Saudi Arabian Government. The Lebanese Government has been reluctant to take any action against the newspapers, most of which are owned by Muslims, because it fears this would exacerbate the tensions already existing among the various religious groups in the country.

Egypt may seek to interfere in the forthcoming elections to bring Lebanon's foreign policy more in line with the progressive Arab states. Nasir also wants to line up revolutionary Arab forces in Lebanon under his Arab Socialism banner, as opposed to the rival Syrian-led Baath, in the battle against the conservative states.

Conservative Arab states also have an interest in the forthcoming elections, and they have some influence in Lebanon. The closure of Lebanon's largest privately owned bank in October 1966 underscored the economic power that Saudi Arabia has in the country. The crisis was

precipitated in large part by the Saudi decision to withdraw large amounts of its deposits from the bank. Riyadh was angered by what it considered the extremely pro-Egyptian policies of the government. Other large-scale Saudi holdings in real estate, business enterprises, and banks so far have not been affected, but this economic weapon can be used at any time and the Lebanese know it.

25X1
25X1

25X1

The Shihabists, the "Christian Opposition," and "The Beirut Grouping" have all queried the United States Embassy as to whether the US would be willing to give financial support during the elections. The USSR doubtless will make some funds available to the Lebanese Communists to use as they see fit, but there are no indications that the USSR will involve itself in a heavy and direct manner.

25X1
25X1

Iran, the UK, and Jordan tend to support the anti-Shihabists,

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

who are anti-Egyptian. It is not likely that these countries will play any important role in the elections, although Iran has some influence with the sizable, though minority, Shiah Muslim community.

The part that France will take in the elections is unclear at this time. With friends in both camps, it is unlikely that Paris would chance any action that might alienate either group. There are unconfirmed rumors that it may support selected anti-American candidates in both camps.

Post-Election Outlook

If the "Christian Opposition" wins the elections, its pro-Western foreign policy almost certainly would increase sectarian tensions, and the possibility of another communal crisis could be in the offing.

25X1

25X1

* * *

SECRET

Secret

Secret